



Episode 540 – Sensei Fran Vall and Simone Fary | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hello everybody, welcome. This is whistlekick Martial Arts Radio Episode 540 with today's guests, Sensei Fran Vall and Simone Fary. This one's a little bit different, I think you're gonna like it. Well, I'm Jeremy Lesniak, I'm your host here for the show and the founder of whistlekick. And everything we do with this company is in support of the traditional martial arts. If you want to see what that means go to [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com), that's where you're gonna find everything that we're doing. One of the things we're doing, we're selling some stuff, raise some funds to keep all this going. And if you use the code `podcast15`, that'll save you 15% off, we've got a bunch of different stuff over there. So check it out. If you want to check out stuff for this website, [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) is the place to go. The goal of the show is to connect, educate, and entertain traditional martial artists throughout the world. If you're up for supporting us in addition to making a purchase, you could also share an episode, tell somebody about what we're doing, or support the Patreon [P-A-T-R-E-O-N.com./whistlekick](https://www.patreon.com/whistlekick). Patreon is a place where we post exclusive content, and you get access to it. Some of it for as little as \$2 a month, the more you are willing to contribute, the more we're going to give back to you. Our setup today is a little bit different. Our guest for the show is Sensei Fran Vall but I'm joined with Simone Fary. Why? Well, because Sensei Fran was the subject of a documentary that Simone put together recently, and it was really hard to talk about how we were gonna bring Sensei Fran on and talk about this documentary, as well as her story, which is an amazing story by the way, without talking about the documentary, and thought you know what, let's let's give it some more context we'll bring Simone on. And that's what we



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did. It's a great conversation, where we unpack in amazing life story that isn't even close to over yet. But it's one that you've got to check out. If you don't come out of this episode feeling inspired, then you probably weren't listening. So here we go. Sensei Fran, Simone, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

**Fran Vall:**

Thank you, thank you so much for having us.

**Simone Fary:**

It's great to be here.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's great to have you. Now, of course listeners are going, wait a second, Jeremy that this is this is a Monday show. This is interview show and there are two people. You just introduced two people, what's going on? And yeah, this is not typical for us. We don't generally bring multiple people on.

**Fran Vall:**

Yeah, interesting.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, well we we like to go, we like to go deep. And that doesn't mean we're not gonna go deep today. But there's a there's a really good reason that we have both of you on today. And Sensei Fran I know we're gonna, we're gonna talk a lot about your history. But let's, let's kind of start a little bit from from the now and there's something that we can say about you and your training that most of us cannot say about our training in that, there's a film about your training. And I'm gonna I'm gonna leave it up to the two of you to decide who's gonna who's gonna start in and tell how about this? Whose idea was it? How did that, how did that happen?

**Fran Vall:**

I think Simone should start because she and her her professional husband also did all this and it it took over about five or six years to put this together.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Wow.

**Fran Vall:**

So I'll let her start because I think that's where it begins.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sounds good to me.

**Fran Vall:**

Thanks Simone.

**Simone Fary:**

Well, I met Fran several years ago at the College Park Judo Club. And it was, the more I got to know her the more amazing things I learned that she did. And it was always cool to see her often when the Senseis were doing the bow out that all these male Senseis would have to bow at the span at the beginning of the line. A little friend um, and you know, first I learned that she was this a very accomplished Judo player that everyone looked up to. And then I learned oh, she also does Naginata, and she's also a dancer, and she's also had this amazing career in the Foreign Service. So first, it was just this idea that wow, she's so interesting. I should do a documentary about her. But then as I kind of thought about it more, realized that you know, there's there's not enough positive portraits of strong accomplished women out there, that that would be a contribution. And, as I grew a little older myself, I saw there's a special need for portraits of of older woman who live life vibrantly, and make contributions to the world. And then I think especially in this time, Fran is a person who approaches life positively and courageously and I think that role models of that are particularly needed right now. Fran really believes in making connections with people all over the world. It's a big part of who she is and her dedication to martial arts into and to living life in an engaged community-oriented way. I think is, is really something we can be inspired by at least I am. And hopefully your viewers will be too.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'm sure our they will be, I am. You know, I'm inspired by just the little bit that I got in preparing for this show. So, Sensei Fran what what was it like with the idea of someone saying they wanted to make a documentary about you?

**Fran Vall:**

Well, well I thought, really? And then it you know it would just picked up. And then we just did little segments, we got together whether it was Naginata, or Judo, or some dancing. And then she came up to the ski resort where I've been for the last 29 years of skiing and snowboarding. So it all started falling into place. And we just did this in bits and pieces. And it was just, I thought she had documentary, I don't well. Just continue doing what you're doing and then someone has taken an interest to put it in a documentary, that was pretty overwhelming. But you know, I just did these things as, as Simone has said, it's just a lifestyle. It's a way of life. I have the interest and I have the energy and a good health. Amen to that. To do that. Aside from a few surgeries now and then, you know. As we age as things go on, that's how it is.



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**Simone Fary:**

Yeah, the thing... I'm sorry Fran. And one of the reasons it took so long was because Fran is so busy just to find time to make to her, like you see even in my my summary of the Live Google event, oh, she does all this some skiing and snowboarding and she specializes and you know, in different types of skiers, too, so yes, she's got. Yes, and I haven't even mentioned all the things that Fran does but you, we've scratched the surface.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, it seems like quite a long list and and I'm gonna, I'm gonna break kind of one of my personal rules here. Something that my mother raised me pretty strongly to never do. And Sensei Fran, I'm gonna ask you your age.

**Fran Vall:**

I'm going, on Election Day, unfortunately, um I'll be 82. And by the way, I just voted yesterday and the place I went to vote, there was nobody there. And I took my, my neighbor who is 90 years old 'coz I wanted to take her take her and...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's that's awesome. That's great.

**Fran Vall:**

Her sister, so we went in it we walked in and that was just so delightful. I'm glad we didn't go on the 18th. Like last Friday, which was the first time was when Virginia opened up in person voting last week, last Friday, and I haven't been Maryland and DC are gonna follow next month. But it was delightful to walk in, vote, and get out of there. I'd have I have no intention of doing this mail thing, which is such an issue now as you know.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I, I don't I don't blame you. So...

**Fran Vall:**

I can't handle that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

All the all this training, that you've done all these different things. And and as Simone mentioned, we haven't even really scratched the surface. You know, you both told me some of the things that that you're engaged in and have been for a long time. But here I want to I want to start to rewind the clock a



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little bit because at 82 and pardon me for putting such a fine point on that. There aren't very many women training at that age. And if I'm if I'm getting my, my context, right, you've been training for quite a while.

**Fran Vall:**

I started Judo in 1959 when I lived in Wilmington, Delaware.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Pardon me for laughing because that's, I think that's...

Fran Vall:

That's like 60 years ago.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, that's the definition of a while. Go ahead.

**Fran Vall:**

Yes. And then it's a lifetime. You know um, and then Naginata I was fortunate when I lived in Japan when I lived in Japan in the Foreign Service. I had three assignments, which was fabulous when I was in Tokyo from 69 to 72 no 70 to 72. I started Naginata, which was I mean, when you start a martial art in the country where it has, it originated, it was pretty amazing. And then also in Tokyo, the mother school of Judo called The Kodokan is there so needless to say, I was ecstatic because I train there and while I was there, I got two promotions, three and just, you know you're there, you're training all the time. It's like training with God, it's so all the Head Senseis, all the amazing teachers that are there. Now, to back up really back up when I first went to Japan as I 62 to 65. I was in support of my favorite part of judo, but I went and I had the occasion to meet Fukuda Sensei in 1965 at The Kodokan. You might know her name. She was a just a legend got her her 10th degree while she was alive many years ago, and we had a wonderful party for her foot. And then they were planning her 100th birthday, what, five years ago. And she died two months before her hundredth birthday. It was very it was. It was very emotional.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Pardon me for jumping, and she was the first woman to be awarded a 10th dan in Judo, wasn't she?

**Fran Vall:**

Oh, my God, and she probably will always be, I don't know yeah, the 10th yes. And she was, it was just such an amazing experience to be there with her when she got it. And, you know, in her little humble way, she's gone. And it's just she was just, it's just so inspiring. And I work when she we had various, several clinics and workshops with her and I often would be hurt, okay, the person, you know, working



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with the teacher. And she would be teaching and I just felt, you know, I was so elated to be with someone that high, oh, it's just I can't you can't talk about it without getting emotional.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah.

**Fran Vall:**

The same thing happened in Naginata. 'Coz I remember being at the one of the schools there and it's outside of Osaka. And on one side of me was the Soke, a Soke in Japanese means the Head Sensei of this arc. And on the other side was the other guru who was, it was just I thought to myself, this is a very interesting feeling or sensation. I thought if I should die right now, it would be okay. Because I'm training with God's godlike people. And they were wonderful. They've all since passed away. And like in everything else, especially in the Naginata some of the Head Senseis that I trained with. They were just very personal people. They were just, they were just very much like family to me. And they've all passed away now because I think they were in their 80s I don't think anybody got to their 90s. So be it. So I I think, I don't think of myself sometimes as being the Sensei, when I think of them as the Sensei that we are instructors, do you understand that expression?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I do. I do.

**Fran Vall:**

There is a Sensei, there is an instructor. But as you age, and as you I mean, your body changes. So you do, you address the art in a different way. There's a different insight, there's a different feeling, a different way of approaching and teaching it and it's really helped me to be a better teacher and to be more insightful, just working with people who are coming up, or who are, who have also trained all their lives as well.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We have people from from all over the world, all ages, all styles, and some of them are likely nodding their heads as you talk about how the art and the expression of the art, the instruction of the art changes as you age, but some of the younger folks might not be wrapping their head around that. I'm wondering if you might be able to go a little deeper and help those younger folks understand.

**Fran Vall:**

You know, you train with different teachers. You train with, with different levels of teachers, you train with students as well 'coz you're all you're the student when you're with the Heads with the Senseis. It just gives you a different feeling of understanding of how more of a not only a physical but a



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psychological and just a historical background what what what, where it came from and how they have trained and how hard they had to work at at where they had where they have they accomplished. And um now of course we are just as you know, during the pandemic, it's it's even more important for us to keep, continue to, to work at our martial arts. All of them are wherever we're doing this. As I said to Simone and everybody, I go out every day into with mother nature and it gives me a chance to reflect and to think about how you know how we're approaching this challenge we're in now with this pandemic.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

For sure.

**Fran Vall:**

[0:14:18 - 0:14:19] says, he was a martial artist understand that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yes.

**Fran Vall:**

It's something that it's something that it's also something sometimes you can't really talk about. Something that's it's something fun within to go out and I said more sometimes we'll start doing some [0:14:38 - 0:14:39] what works and what she called just just movements. Or I take my Naginata stick out sometimes and I do some work out there where nobody around thinks I'm losing it out there with my stick. But it's just you're out there doing your thing. It doesn't matter who's watching you and do they want to watch you that's fine. But it's it's something that's personal that you almost can't talk about Jeremy. But you as an artist have done all these other artists all these budos. Budos, the Japanese word for martial art. So, um, it's something that's very it's deep inside it's something that you really sometimes can't talk about. Does that makes sense?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It does to me, I get it. The people listening...

**Fran Vall:**

It's like, whatever you're devoted to, whether it's whether it's your personal work, your profession or your your interest in things like that. And that's all very important. Sometimes it's very difficult to talk to people around about this. I just went over to visit a friend of mine on Sunday. I introduced this, this was just as a judo story. There were three girls that are all were roommates at the time, they were all working for the State Department as I was. And I introduced them to Judo. There were three single guys. And I just not you know, I was excited to introduce them to Judo, not thinking about being a



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matchmaker, which I didn't think about. And all of them eventually married one of them. This one that one family I did, I went to see the wife the husband has since died several years ago. And they have six beautiful children and are all very, very much involved and devoted to Judo. Right now it's on hold because of a pandemic. But we go out and we reminisce on she has, she just turned 80 and her oldest son did this incredible scrapbook, and so many pictures and so much. So I went through it, and each one had our we had our own page, but she and I reminisce. I knew her parents, and her I know her family, and just it was just, it's like an adopted family. And it was it was so interesting, because I would when I was in the Foreign Service, I would come back certain times and I would always go over to the Tomais to be with them and to stay with just to visit with the children and to kiss those kids grew up doing Judo when they could as soon as they could crawl. So they've been devoted and they're like my little they're like adopted family. And I take the blame for introducing the mother and father but well, it worked out that way. And she's she's, she's got what 14 or 15 great grandchildren.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh that's wonderful.

**Fran Vall:**

Grandchildren, no grandchildren and several great grandchildren. So, you know, it's like it's just so special. So we have a lot to communicate with about this, and we talked about it I talked I talked to her all the time because it's very important. They're like my adopted family or I'm I've been adopted since I take the blame for introducing mother and dad.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Simone sounds like you were gonna say something?

**Simone Fary:**

So Carl to my one of the children she's speaking about she she worked with him to become a US champion in Judo Kata.

**Fran Vall:**

Oh, in the Kata Pro, we had we did. Carl and I competed in three of the three of the seven Kata, there are seven katas we did three. We competed first, what five years I think. And then his sister who was in the youngest of the children, Diane, she was in, in France for a three-year job and and when she came back, she became his partner and doing very well but he and I did three Katas. And did you know Kata was one of my favorites. But it is probably up to seven. There are seven classes in judo. It is the hardest and the hardest is because the movements are very much unlike they're harder for men to do because of the stretching and the lifting. And I mean and the arching and things that you have to do that meant that but those bodies cannot always do. Maybe women it may be the women find it easier to perform it.





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But of the seven Katas and I have competed in all of them. It is I think the hardest because of that, of course of the movements and you can understand that. Can you hear me but I don't see anybody?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, yeah. All the videos off.

**Simone Fary:**

Wait, we can hear you.

**Fran Vall:**

And when you do Kata and I and we really highly promote Katas also a Naginata as well. When you do Kata, that's another that's another form of understanding and insight of what what goes on about your movements and why you do them. And it just, it just has a special it has a special reward for doing that kind of training. And we do a lot of Kata now as all of us are aging ghastly. They're all getting older, and the youngest in our 50s they're 50, the youngest of the six to my children now 50. But is we and we share a very common communication with it, which is very special. And breaking it down. And that's the other thing. It is, you know, Jeremy, if you're breaking down something, I did this in skiing, especially skiing and snowboarding, I have found that this martial arts have helped me teach and be more aware in teaching my on-snow activities, as opposed and also from from just because the Judo the the martial arts has helped skiing and snowboarding or the snow sports and the other has helped me. So I'm, I'm writing an article, I haven't put it down on paper yet it's gonna be called, "East Meets West: Positive Transfer", which means the Judo or the martial arts have been very helpful in helping me teach the snow sports and the snow sports in reverse. Does that make sense?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It does. It does I've spent a little bit of time on the slopes. I want to, I want to go back, I wanna I wanna go back because it this is the stuff that that Simone was was hinting at when we started this, this idea that you have this laundry list of things that you've done. And so now we just learned that you teach skiing and snowboarding, which that's that's already blowing my mind because I, as someone who lives in Vermont and grew up in New England, I know when snowboarding started and you you were not terribly young when that started.

**Fran Vall:**

No, I think I was in my 50s or mid-50s I guess, late 50s. And you know, I just took it up because I thought it would be a fun thing to do. But the first time I went out, I can tell you this right now I felt so much oh my god, it was like I was kissing the snow every other second, my poor [0:21:55] I thought I'd never be the same. But I found it a challenge. And I know there's different levels and I took the test and passed a



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test and I probably will never take another test. Because now when I go out I don't go out unless somebody's with me.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And I suspect that this is a theme.

**Fran Vall:**

I think you're older you don't want to fall period and you know that's how it is. And that's my prerogative not to fall.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I agree.

**Fran Vall:**

Ever.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

But I suspect that this is a theme.

**Fran Vall:**

It's much much easier when you get older. All right, as I said yesterday, when I went out to vote with my 90 year old, the 90 year old neighbor I kept thinking Dear God because she was holding on to me and I thought gotta hold or we're gonna fall. Now I felt very strong with her. But you know, I thought dear does this dear little lady is holding on to Fran. Well, be there for her. And you know, I could feel there's this I have an interesting too when I when I hold your hand I have pretty strong hands, I guess over the years for the Naginata and the jJudo. So if I hold on to your hand, I hope I don't stop the blood. And I do clearly say that. But you know, you you hold on to someone as it's just something that you do. I remember hiking in California not too couple years ago when we were down this trail, and it was a little place where it was very. It was very, it looked ery challenging. And this gentleman was ahead of me. Did you want me to take your hand? I said, Sure. So I took my hand. He says, gosh, you have a strong grip. I didn't want to tell him I did Judo. So I just took his hand but I could feel the hand tightening on his hand as a feeling of security of you know, of stability, I guess that. But you know it is that you know, I'm happy to say I have the strong body just be careful not to fall. And I it's the main thing most people think about as they get older.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right.



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**Fran Vall:**

As we as you say.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Let's let's go back to when you were when you were younger, but there's there's a there's a place that I wanna get to with this because I think there's something that the audience is gonna really appreciate if we dig in. You said you started in 1959?

**Fran Vall:**

I was very athletic also in growing up and also in high school belong to this Athletic Club or whatever it is. You do these things because my mother was not really an athlete. She was a runner, I think as a younger person, but that's it. My dad was not though I know, he was just a very hard worker and grew up in very difficult times. My sister wasn't too much of a of a, she did she take she had her own thing, but she didn't do much. Nothing. Nothing in Budo though.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

But there weren't very many women getting started in martial arts, at least in the United States.

**Fran Vall:**

Well that's very, that's very very true.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So so here, here's where I wanna get, but bear with me it's kind of a kind of a two part thing. There there was something about your personality, in 1959 that that made you say, hey, not only is this something I'm interested when culturally, it's not something most women are doing. But it's so male dominated, but I don't care. And I'm gonna charge through this. Did that at all come down from from your parents from your mother? Was there some inspiration there? That set the tone?

**Fran Vall:**

Yes, yes, yes. She, I never thought about I, I started this Judo class, because my mother thought that I should learn self defense, this is a 1959 Jeremy. And she said, this is how I started. She wanted me to take a course at the YMCA in the self defense. And I said what self defense? I mean, Dear God, that in those days, that was just it's something they never thought about or talked about. Now. It's, I mean, we live in that in that environment. So I did what mother told me to do. I was good, obedient child. I took the class, which obviously, only in it for two weeks. And that's when I, I knowingly had been introduced to going to taking working for different in the Foreign Service for the State Department, I went down to the lady's YWCA, and took the test and got interviewed and blah, blah, blah, and got hired. And I went out, that's how I went down to Washington, the friend I went with and who took me that who



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introduced me to all this thing as at the YWCA. She decided not to when she got married, had a family. Well, that's how I got down to Washington DC. And by I was very lucky, got introduced to Jim Takemori, who was a namesake in Judo who passed away five years ago. So that's how I started Judo and I was extremely devoted to it. I think I trained four or five days a week. So you know, there it was, and that's just how it started. So it became a lifestyle. And it is has to be a lifestyle and a very, very definite dedication. And you just do it. And I didn't think about it. And then when I got I stayed in Washington purposely, because I wasn't I wanted to get introduced to the State Department and see how it worked and was very, very helpful and very insightful. When I got assigned to Japan, I was ecstatic. She said...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh that was that was just luck? That wasn't a choice?

**Fran Vall:**

Yeah, well, I asked for Japan, I had no idea what Sapporo or where Sapporo and became I mean, I, I almost wanted to I would i would have retired there in a heartbeat. But at the time, and as you know, the yen to the dollar was really bad at the time. And I thought you know, if I depend on, on, you know, I would have probably worked there and taught English, which everybody does in Japan. And I would have stayed there and I could have continued my Naginata and my Judo and everything else, but I found the Heads, the Head Sensei in all of Hokkaido, Hokkaido was the island there that the the northernmost island. I I got introduced to him and he just adopted me like in all in his dojo, his dojo was in his home. And I just became part of the family type thing and train with him. And at the time, who was living, one of the other Senseis, who was what it was 70s at the time, I was what 23. And I just fell in love with Japan, because I got so involved in it. And I did and Hokkaido, of course, is ski country. And that's where I started really thinking seriously skiing, there was wonderful and point, it was just, it was just a wonderful experience. I was only there two or two years or so. And I should have stayed more. But then I was lucky, got two more assignments in Japan, in my course. And I think it has to do the fact that I was in hardship posts. But one of my claims to fame in the Foreign Service was Afghanistan for three and a half years from 72 to 75. And one of the things I did there, which was really wonderful is that they had an international school there. And I started a kids' class. I think I bet had 30 and 30 children. It was so exciting and so wonderful because it gave it there was not a lot to do in Afghanistan. Besides, we had our group we start we formed a hiking group, which we did. And we had an a amateur theatre group, but this in this kid's class was so much fun and the parents were thrilled because it gave their kids something constructive to do to a couple times a week and I took I went to a local tailor and he made a little Judo gis and their obis, the little belts for two bucks. So it was a big it was a big um income for them. So I was very happy about that. I wanted to do a an adult class, but I don't think they would be interested. And that's a lot more, that's harder to do with kids, you can just have a good time. It's a different approach to teaching. But I thought it was more of a contribution for the children and, and then also what they had in Afghanistan, they had the Germans had a school, from zero from zerowhich from kindergarten to eighth grade, and I had a judo class there. Now, my German was next to nothing at



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the time. And one of the kids, 11 year old kid who would help translate, so I started picking up and learning some German. And I taught Judo there and they were very receptive. And they had a very lovely school there. They also had a small commissary, which I had privileged to use. It was really exciting. Although it was just a wonderful experience to so you know, one door opens and it does doors open all the time. So my smite, love, and everything for Judo, continued, especially in some photo with my teacher, they were just, they're a family. And then after the Sensei passed away, I had gone back to Judo, back to Sapporo on several occasions. And just stay with the family. And now the wife and the daughter speak very little English, though, what the daughter speaks more English because she's younger, she, if she couldn't, couldn't get the words or whatever, we had dictionaries, you know, they have those little computers, you put the word in English, it comes back in Japanese or in Japanese, it comes back in English was pretty incredible. So I went back in 2000, May of 2017, because they were tearing down the house they lived in, I guess, was bought by the government and they were tearing the whole thing down. So it was really emotional. They have moved into what they call a man a mansion, a mansion in Japanese is an apartment building. And I, I will probably want to ever go back to Sapporo, I will not go back to that place because I couldn't back go back to that location and see it's probably been, they probably put up a condo like they do here in America, everything, it puts up another construction. So going back to Sapporo is very special in the Kobe is another very special place to me to. So Japan in general, because there's so many memories, and I still have all these people that I try to keep in touch with and right you.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I want to pass the ball over to to Simone for a moment. So you know, we were starting to get this this amazing life story here. And I'm curious, when did you realize that the path and Sensei Fran had followed was was so atypical, that it warranted telling the story?

**Simone Fary:**

It was a gradual process but I realized just hearing Fran's response and your question that way before Nike wanted to trademark "Just Do It". Fran was a "Just Do It" person.

**Fran Vall:**

I you know, that's, you know, Simone I often think of that expression, just do it. I mean, I think that's such a great expression. Just do it. It is. Just do it.

**Simone Fary:**

Yeah.

**Fran Vall:**

That's a very, I love that. Yeah, it's a very good model.



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**Simone Fary:**

Yeah in a way, you know, there's not one little canned answer to you know, why Fran does what she does, and one canned answer to why there was not one moment like, okay, this is it, I have to make this documentary. You kind of are called to things in life. I don't know if that sounds maybe too spiritual for some people. But...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Not for me, I get it.

**Simone Fary:**

Yeah, I mean, there's some things that are just a natural fit, and you were meant to do and I kind of felt like for whatever reason I was meant to do this documentary and Fran, you know, inspires me to in her openness to new experiences, you know, to being aware of, you know, what is interesting and where she can, you know, have a role and play a part.

**Fran Vall:**

You know, another thing I must insert here if I may, is that having been in a foreign service and loved all over the world, and you interact with all people from all over the world. Living here in this area is very much like being in the Foreign Service. Because as you know, in Washington, DC, every country is represented here in their embassy, so I never feel far enough far from being in the Foreign Service. You understand what I mean by that?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. Why did you choose the Foreign Service?

**Fran Vall:**

So, East meets West it's not it's very not uncommon to walk down the street and hear three or four languages. So you pick up, I can now say thank you in 10 languages and happy birthday in 7. I just learned how to say happy. Oh, happy birthday in Vietnamese don't ask me to say it, I have it written down, I have to go study it to say it. And when I said Happy Birthday to the 90 year old who just turned 90 year old last month, she actually understood me. She said she didn't cheat. I was very happy. So I wrote it down phonetically. And now I can say happy birthday in Vietnamese.

**Simone Fary:**

Yeah about the mix of cultures and people, I think I really saw that on the mat too at the dojo. And I think it's so important that in, in the martial arts, it's one of those cultures where people from all kinds of different cultural backgrounds and political opinions can come together and just share something and be friends. And we need more spaces like that. So I just want to encourage people who are struggling to



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continue with their martial arts to try because I think in a country that becomes you know, it's becoming more divided and differences and more clarity to be, you know, able to work together. Like that is um...

**Fran Vall:**

Especially now during this election and everything else. Yes, thank you.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, for sure. What prompted the Foreign Service? We kind of jumped over the why on that?

**Fran Vall:**

Well, my friend introduced me and I was totally oblivious. Because I was going to business. I was just finishing Business College at the time. So I had just finished it. So this was an opportunity. I thought, oh, my God, I'm gonna, I'll do until my parents. I you know, I was gonna move to Washington, oh my god, she's leaving home. Well, my sister was still there, of course, but and I went down my I had a fight. My dear dad was a little nervous, Nellie, whenever I did anything, and if I ever drove back and forth from Washington to DC, from Washington to Bloomington, but I mean, they accepted the fact that I was gonna leave home and go down to Washington, DC. But then after three and a half years there, three years there. And I said, that's also on I work. I also work for Red Cross down there, too, which was very, a wonderful start to my interest in in that kind of volunteering. Anyway, I realized that, um, I don't know, I forgot, I've lost my train of thought. So let me think.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's okay. That's all right.

**Fran Vall:**

Anyway, so that's how I got it. I got into Foreign Service but and then I decide because I went into Foreign Service means you go overseas, but I chose not to go into the foreign overseas right away, because I wanted to get a feeling for working at the State Department, which I did, which was very, very helpful. I got great contacts. And by the grace of God, I was able to go to Japan, especially thinking about Judo. And that just reinforced it my God, how lucky am I? And that's just, it just took off. And maybe it wasn't something that I planned. It just fell into place, which I think is sometimes things work out better that way that you don't plan. It just by happenstance, or whatever you call it. You know how that is.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We do. Now one of the things I've learned from folks who have made documentaries, we've had others on the show who've made documentaries, I have a number of friends who've made non-martial arts documentaries that I've had conversations with them. And one of the things I've learned is that they



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they seem to always take much longer and require much more effort than anyone imagines. Was that true of this one as well?

**Simone Fary:**

Absolutely! Very true remark. Yes. Part of it was just yes getting on friends schedule. Some time. Um...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I can't imagine there's a lot of free time in there, too.

**Simone Fary:**

Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

She's busier. Sensei Fran I think you are busier than I am. And I am the busiest person I know. That blows my mind.

**Fran Vall:**

Can you hear me I don't think about it as being this man, I am. And others have told me that but it's a lifestyle. It's a way of life. If you're not doing Judo today, or you're not doing Naginata or you're not dancing, and I do volunteering too it's really important. So I volunteered. A couple places here we have a place called Wolf Trap, which is a summer theater show and I did that for 25 years, but we didn't do it this year, of course. And then I also worked at Arena Stage which is a very well known place here which is also on hold now but it's nice and that's another place where you interact and go oh my god, especially Wolf Trap. We have a very very because of the all the in the embassies and stuff here we have a very large foreign community here. So it's just an the same thing that wolf at White Tail. I mean, I did speak 10 languages up there. And one day of you know, we have Europeans and there's a very large Asian community. A lot of Chinese and Koreans come up there. So I've learned to speak, read them, I can always say Happy New Year to them, too. And it's lovely to meet them and their kids, 'coz their children who are growing up here, obviously speak their mother tongue at home, which is important, but they also they're learning English, because they're growing up here. So it's lovely to say, thank you, hi, how are you in Greek, I can still say that. The point is, is, um, it's just so it's refreshing to be in that environment. And we live in that definite environment. Now, I mean, here in this area, I feel very comfortable here. Almost like being still, like, in the Foreign Service. Because, as I said, East meets West here all the time. Just it's a lovely family.

**Simone Fary:**

Yeah. And that actually, for the documentary was a it was a blessing and an well I won't say a burden. But so Fran like, you know, she's so busy living life. She didn't take these pictures, but for you know, a





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few years, she would just say, I didn't really, you know, take pictures. And then one day, she said, I think I have some slides somewhere. And I thought I was thinking you had a box or two said, okay, let's go get. Let's go see. Yeah, and yeah, so you came out of your apartment with like, 10 giant produce boxes of slides.

**Fran Vall:**

Fortunately, I did, I would did my duty, and I typed little labels on everything.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh, that's good.

**Simone Fary:**

Yes. Yes. Yes so the first three year you know, years of this, I thought I didn't really have any images of her before in service and that kind of cute, beautiful images, because she was a great photographer. Very good, um, sense of composition. But yes, and to sort through those and figure out, you know, what, what ones could contribute to the story was a challenge too, because the we said she's done so much, but it didn't necessarily help move the movie forward. So a lot of great slides didn't make it to the, to the documentary. Well, and then...

**Fran Vall:**

By the time I was doing, photography had to change for the close ups, the wide angle, and blah, blah, blah, now you just push a button that does everything. But that was, it was, you know, I took a lot of time to take my pictures and do composition, because there's so much out there. Oh, my goodness, you know, that.

**Simone Fary:**

I mean you can really see with Fran. Yeah. And there's a lot of love in those photos, you know, that she she's fascinated interested by so many things in the world and, and also the pictures of people that she took there, you can see she can establish rapport with people in them. And yeah so eventually is able to pull this documentary off. And then the whole other project of getting the word out about it came in so I really appreciate this opportunity to help get the word out about Fran's story, which I think you know, from its festival experience and, and other venues, I've seen that it can inspire people. So...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

How did you come up with the name?

**Simone Fary:**

Um, it was something like...



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's a great name.

**Simone Fary:**

Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It seems so appropriate.

**Simone Fary:**

Yeah, I heard her tell that story. So I had before so I had her tell it on camera. And unfortunately, now it's become a bit of an issue because Amazon thinks that name is controversial and has rejected the title. So I might have to resubmit it to Amazon. Sensei Fran kicks a asterisk asterisk.

**Fran Vall:**

Well you know Jeremy I, I initially said well, can you say, Sensei Fran kicks tush is that, that that. I mean, people know what tush is, I guess, or I don't know.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I don't know that a lot of the younger I mean, I I understand tush because of my heritage, but not everyone's gonna, gonna gonna get the lineage or the use of that. What I mean, I the home I grew up in tush was used much more often than butt.

**Fran Vall:**

Are you is your background Jewish also?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yes, yeah.

**Fran Vall:**

I understand. So I can say I'shana tova to you?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You sure can, and thank you, and to you.

**Fran Vall:**



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Well, I don't know everything is Zoom now. I can't even go to go to a temple now for the services. And I'm not a Zoom. I mean, we're Zooming now but I just, it needs a lot to be desired, that's for sure. Here we are.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Have you had a day where you had a day where you've had three, four, maybe even six or seven Zoom calls. I call it Zoomlash.

**Fran Vall:**

Zoomlash? Well, I'm learning how to do Zoom now. I mean, you know, now that I finally into the 21st century and have my little computer here, it's so exciting.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Based on your track record, give it six months and you'll have invented the successor to Zoom that'll be three times better in every way.

**Fran Vall:**

I don't want to get too too professional with this thing. Just nice to keep in touch and be able to get a because I was using the library a lot. Well the library is sort of closed down for the rest of the year because they're on the I think you can take you can take out books or put in, you know, you can rent books out and all that stuff. But I don't worry about the library anymore, since I don't need it. But it's just something that a lot of seniors do use because of the computer system because of their computers. And a lot of people still go there to do that, when it's it's open, but the one nearest to me is doing a huge reconstruction, rebuilding thing, and they won't be open till next year, when and if, who knows.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I want to talk about something that you've mentioned a couple times, Sensei you described martial arts as a lifestyle, Budo as a as a lifestyle.

**Fran Vall:**

It has to be.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And that and that's something that's that's really interesting to me is that you followed up that statement with that statement, lifestyle, and it has to be, and I'm wondering if you'd unpack that a little bit for us.

**Fran Vall:**



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If I what?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Just expand on that. That's, that's a statement that I've never heard anyone else make. I've heard it can be. Or maybe it should be. I've never heard it has to be.

**Fran Vall:**

It's, I'm dedicated. I mean, I go to Judo three days a week, at least three days a week, in the wintertime, I only go. Why well, we have a lot of kids that's through College Park where I first met Simone and her lovely, her little boys. But you know, it's something you just do. Because it's, as I said, it's a lifestyle. And I think it's something that has to be habitual, that you do, because it's important in your life, and you're making a contribution. Because now you reach a point in your life when you're not gonna be able to, I can't do I don't do Shiai anymore, which is the fighting. But the Kata is really big. And I can I can do that I can teach it. And it it has to be something it's a it's a dedication, it's almost something Jeremy that you can't talk about. It's just something that's it's, it's your it's part of your life, your your daily life. Does that make sense? You're doing Budo you understand.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I do. I do. Now, Simone, when any any director, anybody who makes a film, anybody who creates any kind of art, creative endeavor, etc. There's a decision and many decisions in how to represent that. How did you go about trying to portray this incredibly varied, layered story that is Sensei Fran?

**Fran Vall:**

Well, in bits of pieces.

**Simone Fary:**

Yeah, it's a gradual process of discovery. And because film is a visual medium, you kind of look for, you know, how can show the story rather than than tell it. I wanted 20 minutes even though I had to, you know, leave a lot of what Fran was out there, just because I think that's a good length that people can get a taste of her story, and then also discuss it. And if there anywhere at one point, I kind of wanted to go through her kind of different aspects of her philosophy. And I think you do see that in the film, still her her value of making connections with people, her approach to diet, also just living simply and focusing on connections, focusing on on action, doing what you what calls to you to be done, to contribute, to teach and to use teaching as a way to contribute to others and the betterment of others. Those are all kinds of themes I wanted to explore when I did it. And she she has a saying, which I'm surprised hasn't come up now, as you say, we had a nice exchange and she would say that a lot. And for her, you know, this exchange between cultures, where you you maybe teach something, but you also



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learn something about a culture too is another kind of key value to her that I wanted that I hope comes through in the documentary.

**Fran Vall:**

I forgot that, you're right.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Where would people find the documentary?

**Simone Fary:**

Great. They go to the film's website, [senseifran.com](http://senseifran.com), you can rent it there. You can stream it or buy a DVD and you can also contact me if you have more questions or you know somebody else who ought to be the subject of a documentary, I'd love to hear from you.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

No, you may have just opened up a door.

**Fran Vall:**

Jeremy, when when this first came out, I was totally oblivious. I never heard the word trailer that there was a trailer out. And I thought you know, the only trailer I know of as a trailer is a trailer. Well, I learned a new word and, you know.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You thought they were gonna hook you to the back of a truck while driving around to promote the film.

**Fran Vall:**

Hook up to some kind of an RV or something, I don't know. Well anyway, now I know what a trailer is yeah.

**Simone Fary:**

That's a good point. You can watch the trailer on the website or you can watch the whole film as well.

**Fran Vall:**

It's only twenty minutes.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay. And you mentioned that this has been at festivals and it's been received well?



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**Simone Fary:**

Yes, it has. Unfortunately um, the festivals now are online, but when we do even virtual Q and A's.

**Fran Vall:**

We're getting some places too up in London.

**Simone Fary:**

What's that? Yes, it was at a film festival in London, the Fighting Spirit Martial Arts Festival. Won Best Documentary there.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh cool.

**Fran Vall:**

Yeah.

**Simone Fary:**

So yes, it's been. It's been well received. It's um, of course, you know, if it was gonna please, everybody, but I think a lot of people have been just inspired by Fran. I remember we showed it at a local screening and cool and young man came up and he said, you know, I was kind of too scared to try rollerblading. I thought I wanted to do it. I was too scared now I've seen Fran, I'm gonna try an old lady.

**Fran Vall:**

Yes. Let's go together. I still have my rollerblades. Absolutely. Do it. Do it. I'll be I'll be the I certainly will take out my hiking sticks to do it now because I don't want to fall. But do it. Just do it. Do it along the fence we can hold on so you won't fall.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I think I know the answer to this question. But I'm gonna ask it anyway.

**Fran Vall:**

What?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Is there anything that you didn't try, didn't do that you regret?

**Fran Vall:**



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Oh, there's a couple places I didn't um some traveling that I didn't do earlier. And I wish I had. But basically, I'm glad I did what I did. But I look back on in the Foreign Service, especially especially when I was in Afghanistan. Because it was such a, it was the time to be there from 72 to 75, before everything fell apart, and they start bombing, whatever they did in 78. But and when I last year, we had a big International World Championship of Naginata, in this part of Germany. And I went along as part of a support team for the for the American team. And some of my friends that I still stay in touch with who I knew in Afghanistan, one family, their husband was with seamens, and I visited them and spend time with them and their kids. Well, their children are all now one is an architect, one is an anesthesiologist. And we had such wonderful, oh my god, great exchange and the anesthesiologist is adore, she goes hiking and all this kind of stuff. And we did some great hiking together. The point is, we both said the husband and I, we left and I left at the end of 75. And they left the same time they had been there longer. He was there for a while he was a engineer. It was we were there at the time, and we left at the time. So we were very fortunate to be there when we were there. I just came off, it was just it's just it was just heart wrenching to see when things started falling apart. And I was there in July of 1970 in 70, 73 is when they had the coup. So we were very very fortunate as foreigners not to have to pack up as much as we could carry and leave like they did in Vietnam. And we were very it the only thing we had is we had a curfew to be in at nine o'clock and that wasn't a hard thing to do. But the whole lot the whole premises here is that there are times to be places. You are when you are and there is the time to be there. So when I was with the family and spending time with them they live up in in another part of Germany and we just spent a great step, a week together it was just reminiscing and thanking our thanking ourselves that we were how luck into knowing how our to ourselves how lucky we were to have been there at the time and we traveled in country which you could not do without getting permission and having you know you know God sign you off to go and travel because everybody heard of Bamiyan which is of course for the bombed statues but we went to Bandimere, Bandimere was the the the one of the Wonders of the World. Seven lakes handmake oh, they're just natural lakes and we went there a couple of times I have to swim one of the lakes, almost froze to death. It was like, it was freezing cold. Anyway, the point is, and they allowed these French professional photographers to go there and do a documentary. I have a fabulous book on a doc on I think I think I can still find it that it's done by the French. In order for you to speak French. See monitors all the first part of it is all in French but then it's all photography total just pictures. You know, a picture's worth a 1000 words, you do not need to have anything underneath it. If I can find it.

**Simone Fary:**

So I think the point is, yeah. I think the point though that. Yeah, that'd be great. Yeah, I think the point is Fran has so many memories now all the things she did do and the people she did meet that there probably isn't any time for regrets about things she did.

**Fran Vall:**

I don't regret that I do.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah I can hear that.

**Fran Vall:**

And do it, you know, don't put it. The other thing is, if you can, sometimes, you do what you do and think, oh, thank God, I did it, then. Because I couldn't do it now type thing, or you wouldn't do it now type thing. You know, there's, there's different plateaus in your life, that you did what you did. And you look back on it and think, oh, I'm so glad I did it, then I wish now, not what it should have could have. But there are other things I could have done more. But you know, I'm just glad I did what I did. So now I'm taking off and I can still challenge myself. I don't think about the age, it's a question of being able to travel again to do it. So we'll see. And safety and all that stuff.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, with let's look forward, let's look into the future. Let's, you know, put pandemic aside. Let's assume, whatever period of time we're about to talk about, there are no restrictions. What do you want to do? What's, what are you gonna put on the list? And this is a question for both of you. Because you're you know, you're you're both here you were talking, we're primarily talking about Sensei Fran but I would I can't imagine Simone that in doing this work, your life hasn't been changed. That to work this intimately with Sensei Fran hasn't had some impact on you and the way you look at the world. So, we'll start with Sensei Fran. Where you want to go, what do you wanna do?

**Fran Vall:**

Well, I know Simone came up and she shared I don't think she had ever skied before. When she and she took a lesson. I felt so honored to give her a lesson in skiing. Do you remember that Simone?

**Simone Fary:**

Yeah, it was fun. I honestly stayed upright too.

**Fran Vall:**

What the you know, it's just, you know, so interesting because, as I said, you can you when you're teaching one thing, there's certain things in Judo that might come out when you're skiing. So one of my decide to insert this one of my colleagues, she and her husband came up for their fifth wedding anniversary, and took a snowboard lesson. So when you fall in Judo, there's a certain way to fall. And that's how she fell on the snow. And it was perfect. But when she fell backwards, that's something else. I mean, you know, when we, you oh no, she I think she tried to do it with with a snowboard on both feet attached. So it's hard, but she did. And you have to be careful that you don't hurt yourself from falling or touch, which everybody does. But the idea is well, you know, it's called, you know, you also have transfer learning. So one thing works through the other. And I know, thinking ahead, there's some other





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traveling I want to do, I still want to go visit these friends that I know that are in California. Overseas, I wanna go back to Japan really badly to visit some of these friends I haven't seen since I left Kobe. And I know I we've lost some of them already in the past, but I want to visit their families. And that's one of my things I definitely want to do. And I will do it. I mean this eventually,

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I have no doubt. I don't think anyone listening, would doubt anything.

**Fran Vall:**

I will do it when they allow us to go and I don't have to quarantine myself. But I would quarantine myself anyway instead, you know, I don't want to just you know, it's just I'm going back to Japan, I feel so I just feel comfortable. And I often think you know, because of the different languages I have spoken or have studied. I often think in that language and sometimes when I get really upset instead of saying something nasty in English, I can think of it in the foreign language. So people don't think they'll have no idea what I'm saying. And if they do, I don't care, because it's like, I don't drive anymore. And it's okay because I just can't handle the impatience and the rudeness out there. But sometimes they just have to be scolded. It's just awful. And it just and I think and so I definitely want to go back to Japan. I definitely spend some time there with which, who is the families that are still alive and well and, well, I belong to a really fun hiking group when I was in Kobe. And one of the main guys who did it oh, so I just found some wonderful pictures on. I have a bunch of stuff I'm saving for you. Simone when we get together, you can reminisce through some of the stuff I never found when we were doing this documentary. But anyway, I want to go back to this see this family. The head guy who did the hiking and I want to see this. I want to visit all these people that are still alive. We did Mount Fuji together, it was absolutely wonderful. So five of us, four the guys and Fran, just so it was just so fun. The head guy who get led most of it, who at the tender age of 45 died from some kind of cancer, I don't remember. But anyway, I definitely wanted to go back. Those memories are so deeply rooted, are so embedded into my back past that, you know, it's hard to talk about it without getting emotional. But I get emotional easily. Anyway. And there's some other hiking some things I wanted to do, I didn't. I wanted to do Kilimanjaro but I never did it. So I my might want to try that again, not again but that. Mount Fuji I did one and a half times I say one and three quarter times. Because the first time we went, I went there, they had to, they know the fog. When a fog comes you cannot you're not allowed to hike, we got to the nice station, there are 10 stations. And it would have taken it will take sometimes a week to get the fog to go down. So, the second time I went back with my hiking buddies, and there's some other hiking I wanna do and you know um, I still I learned how to do or for a while I was studying sign language and I want to get back to doing more sign language because it's so helpful to me. It's another challenge to my to-do-list, to keep up list. The most important thing is to for all of you to know is that I just want to stay healthy. As long as I live my my Naginata said some they gave me a big party several years ago. And they said you're gonna live the live live at least to be 100. I said that would be very nice. But I want to be as healthy as long as I live. Amen to that. And



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then you can do when you have your health, you have everything, you have your wealth. So there you are.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I agree.

**Fran Vall:**

Challenge there's always something to challenge yourself. But I think the most the biggest challenges and biggest barrier is to stay healthy and well. Staying healthy as long as we live because you don't do anything without it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Totally. Simone, how about you? What kind of a two parter here you know what, what's coming in the future for you? And how has this process, this documentary changed your life?

**Simone Fary:**

Well, I would like to tag along a friend on her trip to Japan someday. That would be awesome.

**Fran Vall:**

Have you ever have you been to Japan?

**Simone Fary:**

No, I haven't. I think you'd be the perfect guy to do that. Maybe we can do that someday.

**Fran Vall:**

Oh my god that that would be perfect. All right, let's put that on our to-do-list.

**Simone Fary:**

Okay, sounds like a plan. I'd also like to make other documentaries about seniors like Fran who are role models. I get the feeling that there are a lot more people out there that you know, are not celebrities, but that we should know more about that are good role models for us as we age. And that's um if anybody out there knows of somebody, I would love to hear about that. You can use my website [senseifran.com](http://senseifran.com) to reach out to me let me know. And yes, I also ah yes I also want to keep doing what Fran does, which has inspired me to do, which is keep traveling, keep getting to know other cultures better, and making connections with other people throughout the world. And to live a kind of simple focused life like she does.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Sounds like a great way.

**Fran Vall:**

How about you Jeremy? What are your goals?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Keep doing this show, keep keep growing whistlekick and connecting with and training as many martial artists as I can.

**Fran Vall:**

May I ask you Jeremy how, what is your age?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'm 41.

**Fran Vall:**

Oh my god. You're just getting started, my dear.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I feel like that, I really do.

**Fran Vall:**

You're on your way.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Last week at Taekwondo the we were doing some drills and the instructor kind of generalized a couple of us and said "Ugh kids" and I had to remind him my age I don't consider myself a kid. But, most of the time I feel like one and I'm okay with that.

**Fran Vall:**

Jeremy, you should give me your contact because I know I'll be coming up to Vermont to ski again. We can do this this will be in December. 'Coz that's when we had to pro jam this in December but of course because of this pandemic, everything is dead. So it would be and we used to go to Killington or Mount Snow.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh, Killington's about an hour for me. Mount Snow was a little further but I'd make the trek.



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**Fran Vall:**

That would be so fun. We could take each other to dinner.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh, I'm I'm gay. Okay. let's do it.

**Fran Vall:**

Oh, no. Do you ski or snowboard?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I do. I do I'm not I'm not a great skier, but I am a competent.

**Fran Vall:**

That's okay. It's all right. You know, the last time, not last year, two years ago, when I was up in Vermont, we had the pro jam. I get that much I had never done before I ski with the senior group. Okay, well, most people are in senior groups now anyway. But the oh, this was so incredible. The oldest guy in our group was 92. I mean to, God, I thought like one of the kids on the block. And I remember when we walked up and had a hike up a little hill, he, this the instructor carriage his skis. And I thought, Dear God, he's alive breathing and he's a, he was a very good skier. His son was with us, who was also a very good skier. But it was just the whole idea of being in that presence. He was the oldest. The next was 86. And then there was Fran, and then a couple other 70 year old kids something or whatever. But one of the women had, she had, she had some conditions, so she couldn't ski all day. It was just interesting. And how this was a that's another interesting thing, how the instructors who taught the senior group had to teach according to their ability and to what they could do, and to what level they could do. This 92 year old like God, he just hung, he was just incorrect. I mean, I didn't think of an age, we were just a group. And we got along really, really well. We just just we just did it, which is so it was very, it was very special. It was wasn't an age thing, but it was something I noticed. It was just so oh gosh. And then one of the guys who I would always have a big dinner, a banquet, and they have dancing, and one of the guys who I usually danced with was up there, hadn't been up and hadn't seen her pieces. Can you still dance? I said, does it does a frog hop? Yes. Of course. Shall we dance? Yes. Because I grew up in the 50s, doing jitterbug and all that stuff. But anyway, the point is, is that I mean, I forgot my train of thought, I guess anyway. So keep on going here we keep doing so it would be great. I mean, we have different goals now in our lives. But as we age, these goals can change. But that doesn't mean I'm not gonna, I will always go back into Japan some time. Especially to Sapporo. That's my first love, as I told you, but also the German and we could go. Oh, I could take you to these these martial art, these classes with me to The Kodokan and in Tokyo. Especially to Naginata, that you would be so excited to do this. Simone it would be such an insight to the country.



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**Simone Fary:**

Sounds great.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Not only do I...

**Fran Vall:**

The most important place you'll have to visit whenever you go to Japan is the 100 Yen Shop. It is phenomenal. The quality of stuff is far and above what we have in our dollar stores. Absolutely. But I'm telling you it really is.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sounds far more fun too.

**Fran Vall:**

Yes it is, and one of my favorite things to do in Sapporo they have it's called Daiso and Daiso is a 100 yard shop. It is five floors, five floors. Stores snacks and drinks and bla bla bla, then you have the kitchen, and the dining and, and the office, and you have oh my god, it's just phenomenal. I mean, I've spent hours there and everything is a 100 yen. A 100 yen is about \$1 or \$10 now, because they now have taxes. So you can buy up oh my god it's phenomenal. So we'll put that on the top of our list, Simone.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And I hope you take a lot of photos...

**Fran Vall:**

I never take anymore photos.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

When this trip happens. And I hope that you'll reach back out because we would, we've got to let everybody know, you know, the follow up on on this conversation because this is this has been a lot of fun. So I want to, I really appreciate you both being here. It's been a good conversation. I have no doubt that if we continued this conversation longer, we would have found more and more and more amazing things in Sensei Fran's life. What I think we got out of today was a snapshot, a profile of the mindset of someone who is living life to the fullest, and that's a cliché. We've heard that statement so many times, live life to the fullest. How many people actually embody it? Well, today we heard from one of them, and more so. I think it's pretty clear how martial arts can be a thread that weaves through that well-embodied life and lifestyle. Further, sharing this story in such a powerful way as this documentary. I



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think not only serves to better the world but it furthers a lot of my personal goals. So it was a no brainer to have these two on the show. I want to thank you Sensei Fran, I want to thank you Simone for coming on the show for doing what you've done and what you will continue to do. I am not lying when I say I feel energized and excited about life even more after talking to the two of you today. If you want to check out the stuff, we talked about, the links, photos, maybe check out some social media, get some transcripts for some episodes, go to [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). You can check out everything we got over there, all the episodes we've ever done, sign up for the newsletter, there's a bunch for you to check out. If you haven't been there in a while, do it. And remember, if you want to support us, you've got a lot of ways you can do so you can use the code `podcast15` to get 15% off at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). You could also consider buying one of our books on Amazon, telling others about the show, or supporting us via the Patreon, [P-A-T-R-E-O-N.com/whistlekick](https://P-A-T-R-E-O-N.com/whistlekick). If you see somebody out there wearing something with a whistlekick on it, say hello. Maybe strike up a conversation about martial arts. If you've got guest suggestions or other feedback, I want to hear it email me [Jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:Jeremy@whistlekick.com). I'm gonna leave you for now, until next time, train hard, smile, and have a great day.